

# Speaking to the soul



## Pastoral care

**As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. 1 Peter 5:1-2**

After Jesus' resurrection, he shared breakfast with his disciples beside the Sea of Galilee, and there he commanded Peter to take care of his sheep (John 21:15-17). In today's verses, which were written 30 or 40 years later, Peter recognises that this crucial responsibility is one that he shares with many others. All churches need shepherds, people who have the gift of caring for other people and encouraging them in their Christian lives. Some of these shepherds may be paid for their ministry, but many will do it as a natural expression of their Christian service alongside other responsibilities.

The truth is that we all need caring for. However old and experienced we may be as Christians, we need others to look out for us and pray for us. This is what is known as pastoral care, but sadly this is often focused only on those who are sick or in particular need. There is no doubt that such people should be cared for, but the fact is that we all need to be loved and nurtured. There isn't a time in our Christian lives when we should stop growing.

Offering pastoral care is vital but Peter stresses that it needs to be done in the right spirit. If it is done as a matter of grim duty, it will never be a blessing to others. Caring must flow from the loving heart of someone who does it willingly and gladly. Some people who offer pastoral care will be paid for this ministry, but it would be a disaster if they were to do it mainly or exclusively because of the financial reward. It must flow from their eagerness to serve God.

We all need to thank God for those who care. It is a demanding and privileged ministry that is vital if churches and Christians are to grow.

## **QUESTION**

What have you learned from the pastoral care that you have received? And what have you learned from the pastoral care that you have given?

## **PRAYER**

Loving Father, thank you for those who have been like a shepherd to me. Amen

*Photograph - Belfast Cathedral Lenten Communion burse*

